

King of the River

Loyalty, self-sacrifice, courage—simple Silver Dan had never heard those splendid words. But he had a pretty good idea of what they meant

By Roy Norton

Illustrated by Harold Von Schmidt

The big lumberman was becoming infuriated, for on the other end, with flying feet, the lithe, graceful shape retained poise



IT WAS Big Tom Carroll's pride in his protégé, Silver Dan, the Iroquois, that led the latter into his first serious enmity with a white man. In the two seasons he had worked at the A. & W.'s Camp 64, far off there in the northern wilderness, the white men, French Canadians, had tolerated him. They had appreciated the quickness with which he became a full-fledged lumberjack, and the swift, uncanny skill which he developed as a "river hog" who could do anything with a log in water. They had smiled at the dumb adoration he gave to Carroll, the camp boss, who had given him a chance, who spoke to him in the Iroquois tongue, and who once drawlingly explained, "I hired him for two reasons. One that he was six feet three, just my own size, and another that he was the first damn' Injun I ever saw that wanted to work."

When, at the end of that first drive of a seething hundred and fifty miles, Silver Dan had demanded his pay all in silver and, after walking sober and curious-eyed through the roaring saw-mill town for a few hours, had loaded himself down with four alarm clocks, one long-out-of-date derby hat, one very large silver watch and chain and four full bolts of Turkey-red calico for his mother, Big Carroll had been amused.

"Me come back next winter. Reservation now," Dan had explained, and had kept his word. And now for the second time they had driven their logs into the head of the little lake on whose shores six saw mills ripped, tore and snarled. An army of other men from sixty other camps on three streams had

done the same; come riding, roaring, swearing, looking forward to the annual "big bust," which consisted of temporarily turning Boomville into a miniature hell of gambling, carousing and fighting.

Silver Dan had stared at the fifty silver dollars laid temptingly flat in the window of a saloon but he could not read the white man's sign above them: "Grand Prize for the winner of the first great river contest ever held in Boomville. The best birler wins! FIFTY DOLLARS for the River King!"

SILVER DAN listened to the white man's talk, of which he had gained a limited knowledge. "Palefaces all fools—all but the big chief Carroll," he thought as he wandered on down the slab sidewalks in front of the row of crude saloons, enticing stores, and less enticing abodes of women whose gibes he phlegmatically ignored. Also he avoided the troublesome drunks. He couldn't understand drink. He had tried it once. The protracted after-headache wasn't worth the temporary elation, he decided. More white man's foolishness.

Big Tom Carroll found him quietly basking in the sunshine at the foot of a tree where Boomville's one street ended and the vast wilderness began. "Son," he said, softly, in that tone of voice which always brought Silver Dan's heart up to his neck, "do you know about this contest thing? Well, my camp's got to win it. I'm not going to have rivermen say that Carroll's 64 didn't have the best man on the river. I want

'em to say that Carroll gets the best men. Understand?"

Silver Dan didn't, but slowly nodded his head and grunted.

"Then listen. I'm giving you an order. I'm still your boss until you cash your season's pay check. You're to go out on that river tomorrow and show these lunkheads that Carroll's got a man. Show what an Iroquois can do on top of a log. You're to birl the best of 'em under. Show what a man of your tribe can do."

Somewhat Silver Dan hadn't thought of his tribe. Iroquois! That name of which his people had for centuries been proud, dating back to legendary times when the palefaces had been the despised ones. The thought stirred him almost as much as the friendship of this "Big Chief" who, to him, was the greatest man in all the paleface world. He hesitated, and Tom Carroll's voice went on: "And while you are showing them, Dan, just think that you are birling logs for me, because I want the fifty big dollars I'll win if you beat all the others. You're to get it for me."

"Mebbe Big Chief lose. I dunno," Dan muttered. But Tom Carroll smiled to himself as he walked away. Silver Dan grunted, sighed, drew tribal signs with his finger in the dirt between his legs and wished he could slip away to the seclusion of the reservation and his own people, for whom he was suddenly homesick. Despite his efforts to avoid intrusion he knew that not all white men were friendly. Intuitively he knew that many despised him, even as he secretly despised them. It was not wisdom, he

thought, for a descendant of proud chiefs and great warriors to lower his dignity by engaging in paleface follies.

But to Dan the "Big Chief's" wishes were law, and on the following forenoon he reluctantly appeared and went through the preliminary contests with other camp champions. The little lake was alive with miniature conflicts. With grim determination, unsmiling, Dan met the survivors one by one, and by noon was declared winner of his section.

HE SLIPPED hurriedly away, hoping to escape unwelcome attention, wandered alone for a time, and went almost sneaking back to have another look at the money in the saloon window. He slowly counted the display. Yes, there were fifty dollar pieces there. So they must be the ones the Big Chief wanted. He couldn't blame him, for that was quite a fortune. He wondered what he would do himself if he had that much money on top of his pay check. Heaps of money, that. He was roughly elbowed aside by a group of boisterous toughs who were loudly partisan for someone named Grizzly Donnard. Until then Silver Dan had never heard of him, and yet it seemed that he was the redoubtable champion of many rivers.

"That dough's as good as ours already," one bully asserted. "Griz'll be heapin' it on the bars for his pals tonight, an' we'll make this here camp look alive." Others chimed in but Dan had heard enough and silently, hastily, retreated. Grizzly Donnard's money, eh? Even if the best white man in all the world, Carroll, wanted it! Humph!

Silver Dan stood unobtrusively on the outskirts of the crowd on that sparkling afternoon when he first saw his rival, Grizzly Donnard, whose face was messed up with scars where he had been caulked in scores of barroom fights, whose huge, high shoulders, long arms, and naked hairy chest explained his nickname. Grizzly loudly boasted that he was the "best damn' river hog that ever spiked a log, and could lick any dozen who said he wasn't." He was already drunk, but the moment he took a leap to a log and felt the caulks of his heavy boots bite into the bark he was poise and balance and skill combined.

Silver Dan, squatting on the beach alone, watched him closely and not without admiration. A hard man to beat, that. He watched Donnard overcome two others. He thought they didn't amount to much. Grizzly Donnard, triumphant, reached shore, and was applauded by his backers, and there was a stir on the roughly constructed judges' stand, and the shouts of the crowd were finally stilled to hear the shouted announcement:

"The undefeated men of the two sections that have been eliminated are Grizzly Donnard, of Wells Lumber Company's 37, and Silver Dan, of Ames and Wilkes' Camp 64, who will now engage in the final contest. If both are still on the log at the end of thirty minutes this contest will be declared a draw and the purse split accordingly. Now!"

A wild yell of bawled shouts rebounded from the huge yellow hulks of the idle mills. Most of the four or five hundred gathered on the bank—lumberjacks, sawyers, tailers, and a smattering of camp women, some of them harder than the men themselves—classed an Iroquois as an inferior being. Grizzly Donnard was loudest in scorn and was the first to gain the end of the log selected by the referee. When Silver Dan, graceful and effortless as a timber wolf, trotted forward and sprang, a derisive shout came from some of the worst of the gangs. One or two wanted to know if A. & W. 64 didn't have a baboon or a "Chink" to enter. A free-for-all fight threatened

when some of the 64 crew showed their resentment and were quieted by Big Tom Carroll.

"Drown that lousy redskin, Grizzly! Drown him!" A man from 37 yelled, "Birl him under and keep him down!"

But it is doubtful if Silver Dan heard at all. He was absorbed in watching the brutish, grinning face opposite him as Grizzly edged backward to the end of the log. From then on there was no time to listen to shouts, for the log suddenly whirled as Grizzly's caulks beat a tattoo now on one side, now on the other, birling the big timber this way and that, suddenly halting it with his powerful legs planted, suddenly wrenching it sidewise, or again dancing up and down upon it until, under his weight, it leaped like a living thing trying to escape torment. The big lumberman was slowly becoming infuriated as trick after trick failed. Always there on the other end, with flying feet, the lithe, graceful shape retained its poise, upright, waiting.

SILVER DAN had quickly determined his line of fight. He would let the other man exhaust himself. Already he could see sweat trickling down the bearded face, anger in the drink-redened eyes.

"Birl, damn you! Birl! Whad yuh think y'u're doin'? Jest dancin', you—" and Grizzly ended with a foul epithet that made Silver Dan clench his jaws. But he kept cool, watchful, biding his time until exhaustion began to show itself in Grizzly's speed, and the big man's efforts became more labored, more desperate.

At the end of twenty-five minutes Grizzly stopped and, while the crowd on the shore howled itself hoarse, stood still and cursed. Then suddenly Silver Dan heard above the confusion a familiar voice shouting in the Iroquois tongue, "Now, Son! Now! You've got him!"

With one sudden, abrupt spring he assumed the offensive. His attack was like the sharp pounce of a panther, and as unexpected. His wet moccasined feet bounded upward, down, and as they

hit gave the log a swift sidewise wrench and whirl. Grizzly lurched, threw his great arms upward in a frantic effort to recover balance, and the log shot from under him. He went out of sight in the curling waters, and from the shore came a wild howl of victory from the men of A. & W. 64 and the few others who had backed the Iroquois to win.

Silver Dan took a savage delight, remembering the endured insults, in leaving the spluttering and beaten river hog to make his way ashore as best he could, unaided. Only once did he pause to look back to assure himself that Grizzly was capable of swimming to safety, and then he came lithely to land and for once was a hero to those who knew him. He was confused by his reception. It was unwelcome. He submitted to being slapped on the back until he felt his arm caught by a friendly hand and Big Tom Carroll led him to the judges' stand to be announced as winner.

He disliked all that shouting. He wished he could have slipped away alone. Surely the white men were crazy. He was not certain that his hero wasn't, also, when Tom Carroll refused the fifty dollars which the judges handed him. He listened in a daze until Tom, translating into Iroquois, said, "It's yours, Son. Don't you understand? You own it. You're the best man on the river now. Big Chief of the river."

"But—but—I thought it was for you. You said you would win fifty silver—" Dan protested in his guttural speech, and could not understand until Carroll explained, "No, no, no! I meant I had bet fifty on you. I win that. Understand? This is yours. But if you want me to, I'll keep it for you until you start back home."

"Tomorrow I go. Tomorrow—one sleep," Silver Dan said, and wriggled away like an eel to escape from the camp to where, alone, he could quietly gloat over his new fortune. But he kept his word as to his departure. The last man who spoke to him was Carroll.

"I just found out, Dan," he said, "that next season I'm to have a new camp. No. 65. It will be almost a hun-

dred miles northeast—on the Willowhatchy. So I suppose you'll not be with me again, although I'd like to have you. Number 64 will be closer for you, of course. So be a good Injun and work as well for the new boss as you did for me. Luck to you."

He had stopped from his busy affairs only long enough to say this much, and now another of the paleface bosses called to him and he hurried away, pausing but once to wave his hand when he had taken several strides. On the long trails and canoe trips back to the reservation Silver Dan was heavy-hearted despite his new wealth.

THE snow had fallen deeply in the doomed virgin forest; the long, squat log mess and cookhouses, and the office and living cabin of Big Tom Carroll at Camp 65 were covered with a two-foot blanket of white when a lean, lone traveler came wearily in on snowshoes of which the webs were worn and the thongs had been tied in knots.

"Good Lord! Son, is that you?" Big Tom roared when he was accosted outside his door while anxiously scanning the skies in fear of a fresh heavy fall of snow.

"Me, Chief. Come long way find you. Bad luck. Go hungry. No like work for other white men. So—come here."

That was his sole explanation of how he had found his old camp inhospitable and lonely with Carroll gone. He answered questions vaguely until asked what he had done with all his silver.

"Me keep-um," he said, with the air of confiding in a trusted friend. "Fine girl my reservation. Got nice face. Two braids hair—long—like this. Buy her next year. She like me. Make good squaw. All summer me build big house—big like Big Chief's—same as white man. Buy-um white man chairs and bed and look-see-glass when next summer come. This camp two times big as 64. Huh?"

"It's not too big to keep me from putting you to work, Son," Carroll said, secretly pleased with his protégé's loyalty. "But—it's a hard crew. Worst

(Continued on page 55)



Grizzly Donnard, inflamed with whisky, ready to loosen long-pent hatred, came up behind Silver Dan and bellowed

King of the River

Continued from page 24

lot I ever handled. Go over to the van and get some blankets, then find a bunk and tell cookie to give you some grub. You can start in tomorrow morning."

And thus he learned all that Silver Dan had to tell of his youthful romance and high ambitions. But when the swarm of men came streaming back that night and hung their wet clothes to dry on the racks around the big-bellied, roaring stove, Silver Dan saw amongst the crowd the one white man he hated.

Grizzly Donnard! Often he had thought of the man and wondered how it would feel to see him fall before a well-aimed shot, or slither downward beneath the stroke of a knife.

BACKED by his friends or followers, for he was the acknowledged bully, Grizzly at once began a systematic torment of the Iroquois. His blankets would be tied in knots or wet. His working clothes would be found on the floor, undried, in the mornings. He was never addressed save with an epithet by Grizzly, and the others dared not interfere. One night when the torment had gradually increased, Grizzly was threatening to "take the lousy copper skin to pieces," and was actually advancing toward where Silver Dan stood with black, unwinking eyes, when a shout from the door that had been opened unobserved halted him.

"You lay off that Indian! What's more, if you put a hand on him I'll take you apart, you drunken bum!"

It was Big Tom Carroll who spoke. He did not seem to observe Silver Dan's look of gratitude and admiration, but turned and stalked from the bunkhouse, slamming the door behind him.

"You got me that call-down! I'll get you for that, Injun," Donnard muttered; then fell to boasting of what he would have done to Carroll if Big Tom were not the boss.

Later, Silver Dan lay in his bunk and tried to think it all out. He knew that there is nothing worse than a quarreling, faction-ridden camp. Such a camp would be bad for the Big Chief. Work wouldn't come out as well, less logs would go downstream in the spring. He concluded that if he was one of the causes of such trouble for the Big Chief, it were best to camp alone.

"Want to throw up a little cabin for yourself, Son?" Carroll asked after listening to the Iroquois on the following morning. Then he asked questions and finally fathomed some of Silver Dan's reasons and said, good-humoredly, "Well, perhaps it would be best. You'd probably be happier alone. That's a tough crew I've got to handle this year. I'll give you a couple of men to help throw up the walls and ridge-pole the roof. I don't want you to leave me, Son, after you've come this far."

And so for a month or two more Silver Dan found peace in comparative isolation, even cooking his own food and avoiding the mess house. Sometimes, remembering the tolerant, kindly gang he had worked with that first season in 64, he felt lonely; but there was always the big dream of what the next summer would bring when he took to himself the shy girl with the two braids and finished the wonderful place that was to be "same as white man's house."

And so, dreaming, he stolidly went through his daily and nightly rounds, left alone, largely, save by the Big Chief, who always had a smile and cheerful word for him.

It was on a bleak day in February when the mercury was low, and men's

tempers at their worst, that Silver Dan's air castles came down like snows breaking from the roofs in avalanches. He was working with a mate at one end of a big cross-cut saw, well out beyond their nearest neighbors, when Grizzly Donnard, inflamed with whisky, ready to loose long-pent hatred, came up behind him and bellowed, "I got you now, you copper-faced nigger!"

Silver Dan had not time to get to his feet before Grizzly struck. Dan fell backward into the snow; then rolled quickly to escape the flying caulks that were aimed at his face. They ripped open the shoulder of his mackinaw. His team mate tried to come to his rescue but was bowled over with a kick in the groin. But it gave Dan time to come to his feet, and now, forgetting everything, reverting to his blood, seeing the whole world through a haze of red, he whipped his knife from its sheath and sprang. He felt the blade go to the hilt, as he had once dreamed of feeling it, saw Grizzly fall like a miniature mountain. Then he ran, frantically. He reached his cabin. Its door opened toward the rear of the cook house, which had no windows. Swift in his movements, within ten minutes he had seized his blankets, food, a rifle for which he had traded an ax, his worn snowshoes (which he put on), and was following a back trail.

He traveled throughout the remainder of the day and all night, and the next morning found him nearly twenty miles from pursuit, where he made a wikiup in a heavy growth, ate sparingly of cold food and went to sleep. When he awoke that afternoon he started westward with a definite goal.

When coming to that camp of ill fortune he had passed an abandoned trapper's hut and looked at a string of rusty traps left behind on the wall. That was now to be his hiding place. He dared not return to the reservation. He would be homeless forever, never again see his own people, or the girl with the two braids, or the house of magnificence on which he had worked with such hopes and dreams.

There was but one comforting thought in his mind: that with all that silver he had so hardly earned and hoarded, his mother would be comparatively rich while mourning her son. If he could work a trap line throughout the winter and find some way of trading in his catch in spring, he could thus get enough silver to enable him to leave the country behind, traveling far into that vague northwestern lumber country of which he had heard some of the wandering lumberjacks talk.

TWO days later, with the Indian's unerring sense of direction, he had found the abandoned cabin, was repairing its half-fallen roof, and was settling grimly down to what seemed to him, in heartbroken youth, a futureless existence. A week later he was running a trap line with a diameter of sixty miles, extending clear to the banks of a stream where there was a promise of beaver, long untrapped, awaiting his skill. He had no remorse for stabbing Donnard and, save for its after-effects, was unrepentant; but when spring came, with waters seeping beneath each snow bank, with the honk of wild geese overhead, he was still unreconciled to his fate, homesick for all he had lost and for the river.

The yearning increased as the waters trickled, ran, swelled the streams. It became unbearable. He must have one

(Continued on page 56)

(Continued from page 55)

more sight of a drive before he left this land that was his own, his tribe, his people, its memories. Like a wanderer in purgatory he reached the river and was lying prone in a thicket when the first logs from Camp 65 came bobbing downward like the exploring vanguard of a host. He watched them as they took on speed to venture the rapids, the gorge, the falls below, and he thought, as a lumberman, that it was a bad place in the river. He stood on the bank in the dim light of the night, seeing the thousands of logs march by.

A lost pike-pole ground near him. He swiftly retrieved it. And then, standing there in the gloom of the night, his acute ear caught a sound of menace that he recognized. A strange, sullen, bumping, grinding note, and he moved restlessly. A jam forming up the river!

WHEN dawn came he could see it, and was amazed at its proportions. He had never seen a jam of such magnitude. It was piled in a seemingly inextricable mass, fifteen feet high, with water spouting angrily through it in a hundred streams, and every now and then a log from behind would bound clear over the top rim, thrown high in the air as if shot to freedom. Some of them came as if cast from a catapult, like mere straws carelessly blown by some gigantic breath. Already men were working on it here and there, helpless pygmies struggling against disaster. With the coming of full daylight he could even recognize them, remember some of them by name, identify those who had been friendly, and those who had not. He saw their grouping when they gathered on a bank, and then after a while his heart thumped when three men started out with the sand bags, in constant peril of their lives; for leading the way was Big Tom Carroll!

Silver Dan's apprehensions were as great as those of any man in that crowd that stood there watching. Once or twice logs shooting from the crest barely missed the three men, who ran nimbly, skillfully, through the streams of spouting water, found crevices suitable for their work, rammed the bags containing sticks of dynamite held inward in position by the sand, led out the six or seven feet of fuse and coiled it on the nearest supporting log. They hurried to and fro, and always out there in the peril was the big man whom Silver Dan loved.

Finally all were gone but Carroll. The crowd on the bank stopped milling, stood as if fascinated by the crucial danger to come, seeming from that distance to be voiceless, too absorbed for speech, for they were men who knew and appreciated the deadly risk.

Silver Dan crouched on his knees, breathing slowly, when he saw Tom Carroll light the first fuse, run to the next and pause, then to the third. He had almost gained the opposite shore and the men on the bank began to cheer. The cheer was abruptly stopped. It was as if a malevolent spirit had bidden its time to intervene. A flying log came across, struck and, traveling end over end, hit the one on which Carroll was standing. He was thrown upward into the air just as mighty detonations seemed to rip the very skies apart, filling the air with logs, sound or broken, with sheets of water, spray and mist, and the river sprang free with its burden.

Forgetful of everything, the Iroquois was out on the bank now, his agonized eyes roving swiftly and searchingly over the wild turmoil. Then abruptly they stopped when he saw floating past him near the opposite bank a log on which Tom Carroll, badly hurt, was struggling to climb.

Then the men running wildly, helplessly down the bank saw what was even to eyes inured to danger a strange sight. They saw, bounding outward in great flying leaps, with pike-pole balanced, the fugitive Iroquois, daring the thousand-to-one chance on death in the rapids below. He gained a last log, was still far from the one on which Carroll clung, and now he bailed it with flying feet until its end swung diagonally across the stream, and with his pike-pole he thrust and shoved in rapid, vigorous strokes, throwing his whole body into the effort, never failing to keep his poise, driving the log forward in pursuit.

There were moments when in that tragic race with the current he seemed to be losing. He felt despair. There were but a few feet between the log he drove and the one he fought for now, but the current with braided, writhing waters was gathering speed for its rush. Each inch gained seemed to require hours, but at last he dared everything in one prodigious leap, and reached the log bearing Carroll. The log bobbed under at one end, surged upward at the other, and as he lurched an instant, wavered, almost fell, and finally stood erect, the Iroquois had earned a reputation as a river man that would become a legend.

"Have come, Big Chief—have come. Me—Silver Dan." He shouted encouragement, and desperately fought the log toward the bank. Too late, it seemed for moments; then the river swung the end of the log against a rock not far from the shore, and even as its free end was seized by the current and carried outward toward the center Silver Dan clutched Carroll, dragged him ahead, and took the plunge. Time and again both were submerged before he could conquer that bare ten feet between them and safety, and they were exhausted when, twenty yards farther down the roaring stream and almost at the cañon's lips, he caught an alder bush, held, worked himself and his inert burden slowly upward—and fell on the bank, exhausted.

SILOVER DAN lay with his face on his arms in the melting snow, his mind in confusion. They would get him now. He was too tired to escape—but the Big Chief had been saved. . . .

"First time I ever knew an Injun to faint." Silver Dan heard the words as though they came from far away; and then, "Hell! You darned fool. You'd go unconscious, too, if you'd done what he did, I reckon."

Then he heard a voice that sent a thrill through his hungry, lonely heart, the voice of his god among men, saying, "Carry him gently, boys. Gently. He may be hurt."

They were lifting him up and he felt the water nausea of the half-drowned; but his eyes opened on Carroll, who was being hoisted onto an improvised brush stretcher.

"Big Chief—Big Chief," he implored in the Iroquois tongue, "don't let them get me and take me away! I was angry when I knifed Donnard, and—"

"Good God! Don't worry about that drunken dog," Big Tom bawled in English. "He got well, got fired, and went months ago. Besides, your mate swore it was self-defense. If you don't know what that means, I'll tell you sometime. Why, Son, the only searching we did for you was to tell you to come back and go to work. I reckon there ain't a man in the gang now that wouldn't be glad to work with an Injun like you."

And when Silver Dan heard the crowd around him cheering and boisterously shouting affirmation his joy was mingled with the thought, "White men all alike. Got to yell about things. Must be crazy—all but the Big Chief!"